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ABSTRACT

In this study, the effects of differing levels of obligation attached to a gift and differing levels of resources possessed by the donor on the attraction of the recipient toward the donor were studied. Using groups of between three and five college volunteers, subjects were seated in booths constructed so that they could not see each other, were given forty dollars in play money and a wagering board, and were told that they would use the money to make a series of wagers during two phases of the experiment. Subjects in Phase I were informed that whether they won or lost was simply a matter of lack, determined by the role of a die. Phase II involved competition against one another in a game of skill. Of particular interest was whether persons winning would offer aid to any of the other not so lucky players. At the completion of 12 rounds of wagering, subjects completed questionnaires and the amount of money returned by each recipient was carefully recorded. Contrary to previous research, it was found that neither the amount of resources possessed by the donor, nor the level of obligation attached to the gift, significantly influenced the recipient's attraction to the donor. It was also found that (1) more money was repaid to the low resource donor than to the high resource donor; (2) one's attraction toward another is independent of their actions (however; when it comes to teaming up with another person, their actions become important); and (3) the amount of money a subject loaned when placed in a winning condition was not a function of the previous condition they were in. (LH)

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Reactions to Aid

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Paper presented at the 31st Annual Southwestern Psychological Association convention, Austin, April 1985

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The Defense Department has been seeking to expand its humanitarian assistance in such areas as Central America and Ethiopia. A task force that studied the matter last Fall under the direction of Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger contended that increased assistance would improve the image of the United States and its armed forces.

Unfortunately, the well-intentioned attempts to do something for someone else all too often fail in meeting the intended goal. The low-cost housing project is plagued by vandalism, Peace Corps members are showered with rocks, welfare recipients exchange their food stamps for alcohol, and foreign aid recipients dislike the donor country. Too often the impetus to help is not carefully weighed against the potential ramifications of the aid.

The present study represents a partial replication and extention of a study conducted by Gergen, Maslach, Ellsworth, and Seipel (1975). In this study the effects of differing levels of obligation attached to a gift and differing levels of resources possessed by the donor on the attraction of the recipient toward the donor were studied. In addition to studying the effects on attraction, behavioral measures were also included.

Method

The subjects in this study were college students, voluntarily participating for extra class credit. They were run in groups ranging in size from three to five. They were

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seated in booths constructed so that they could not see each other and were assigned letters for identification so that no names would be used. The subjects were not told the true intent of the study but were instead told that they were participating in a decision-making study under conditions of economic cooperation and competition. This deception was used to prevent any demand characteristics from operating. Each subject was given $40 in play money and told that they would be using this money to make a series of wagers. They were told that the experiment would be conducted in two phases. During Phase I they were informed that whether they won or lost was simply a matter of luck, determined by the toss of a die. In addition, they were told that if they lost all their money they would not be allowed to continue in the experiment. The subjects were told that the major purpose of Phase I was to establish differences among them in terms of the economic resources they possessed. It was explained to the subjects that the second phase of the study involved competition against one another in a game of skill. They were told that they would be divided into teams for this phase. Depending on their skillfulness in decision-making in this phase, they were informed that additional funds could be won or lost. As in Phase I, should any team lose all their resources, forced retirement would follow.

At this point, each participant was handed a wagering board and told that the numbers on the board represented the amount

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of money they were required to wager on the various trials. They were told that each participant's board had the same numbers, but in different orders, thus, not everyone would win or lose equally. Pencils, notepads, envelopes, and scoring sheets were distributed. It was explained to the participants that the notepads and envelopes were to be used if they wished to communicate with anyone. The example used was that perhaps they would like to communicate with Player A about the possibility of being partners in the second phase of the experiment. They were instructed to use the scoring sheet to keep track of the amount of money won or lost by the other players.

In actuality, each subject was assigned the same identification letter. Furthermore, the wagering was set up so that all the subjects ended up losing quite heavily, but each subject was under the impression that the other players were faring better. At a critical point in the wagering, when a loss could mean forced retirement from the study, a gift of $10 in play money was received from ostensibly another player. This gift was given by either a person whom the recipient thought was winning consistently or losing quite a lot. This was the donor resources manipulation. Obligation was manipulated by a note attached to the gift stating "pay me back with interest," "pay me back the same amount," "help someone else in the future," or "don't bother paying me back at all," the high, help me, help other, and low obligation conditions,

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respectively.

At the completion of 12 rounds of wagering the subjects were asked to complete a couple of questionnaires purportedly designed to "shed some light on the decision-making process" while the experimenter was supposedly establishing partners for the second phase of the experiment. One questionnaire asked the subjects to rate on a 5 point scale any person that communicated with them in terms of 16 bipolar adjectives. From this was gleaned a measure of attraction toward the donor. The second questionnaire requested the subjects to rank order their preference for a partner in the second part of the experiment. This task was presumably completed to facilitate the experimenter in assigning team membership but in reality was a behavioral measure of coalition choice. In addition to collecting the previous data, the amount of money returned by each recipient to the donor was carefully recorded.

At this point in time of the experiment the subjects were told that there would be no second phase of the experiment, and were given a hoaky explanation that the study was designed to measure their level of attraction to others as a function of both the amount of money they had and the amount others had.

Following this the experimenter "suddenly remembered" that a subject in the next group to be run in five minutes had cancelled and that a volunteer was needed to make the experimental set up look realistic. This volunteer was asked to remain seated while the other participants were escorted out

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and thoroughly debriefed.

In the next group that was run, everything was the same for the new participants. However, the wagering was fixed so that the volunteer from the previous group won heavily. Of particular interest was whether this person would offer aid to any of the other not so lucky players.

To summarize, the following research questions were asked:

1. Is the recipient's attraction towards the donor a function of either the amount of resources the donor possesses or the level of obligation attached to the gift?
2. Is the amount of money returned by the recipient a function of either the amount of resources the donor possesses or the level of obligation attached to the gift?
3. Is the recipient's choice of partner a function of the resources possessed by other players, level of obligation attached to the gift, or whether the chosen partner donated money or not?
4. Does the previous level of obligation attached to a gift or whether the donor had high or low amounts of resources influence the amount of money loaned when the recipient is placed in a winning condition?

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks

Luck. To insure that the subjects understood that winnings and loses were determined solely by luck, one of the 16 antonym pairs in the first questionnaire was the dimension

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Lucky-Unlucky. If subjects were paying attention to the amount of resources that the donor possessed, they should have rated the high resource donor as significantly more lucky than the low resource donor. The data analysis supported the validity of this manipulation; high resource donors were seen as being luckier than low resource donors.

Obligation. To check on the subject's understanding of obligation differences, the dimension Wants something from me-wants nothing from me was included in the first questionnaire. An analysis of variance indicated that the "don't bother paying me back" condition was seen as wanting significantly less than was the "pay me back the same amount" or "help someone else in the future" notes. No difference was found between the "pay me back the same" and "help someone else in the future" notes. Finally, the "pay me back with interest was seen as wanting significantly more from the recipient. Thus, the obligation manipulation worked as intended.

Research Question #1.

Contrary to previous research, we found that neither the amount of resources possessed by the donor nor the level of obligation attached to the gift significantly influenced the recipient's attraction to the donor. All donors were liked equally well; specifically, the average attraction rating was 27 on a scale of 1 to 30, with the larger number indicating greater attraction.

In trying to reconcile the differences between our study

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and Gergen, et al, one potential factor is the fact that our subjects were unpaid volunteers using play money, while Gergen's were paid for their participation. Perhaps the social values are different between paid and nonpaid volunteers. One other possibility, closely related to the first, is that maybe the social values have changed over time. Gergen's study was conducted in the mid-seventies, ours in the mid-eighties. Just like tastes in physical attractiveness have changed over time, perhaps what is considered socially attractive has changed, too. We are no longer offended by people who look out mainly for number one. longer offended by people who look out for Number One.

Research Question #2.

Like previous research, we found that more money was repaid to the low resource donor than to the high resource donor. Low resource donors were repaid on the average $3 while high resource donors netted $1.50. However, unlike the Gergen et al study, we found that the level of obligation influenced the amount of money returned; significantly more money was returned in the help me and high obligation conditions, both netting a return of nearly $7 compared to less than $2 in the low and help others conditions.

Once again this seems to point to the conclusion that social values have changed; people do not expect something for nothing, high interest rates are the norm rather than the exception. We have come to expect to pay, sometimes dearly,

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for what we get.

Research Question #3.

Since we asked all subjects to rank all participants, it was possible to include in our analysis the rankings of the high and low resource participant both when they served as donors and when they did not. This enabled us to assess the effects of being a donor over and above possessing many or few resources.

The data analysis indicated a main effect for donor. Subjects were more likely to express a desire to team with someone who had donated to them previously than with someone who had not donated. In addition, a main effect for resource was found; subjects were more likely to team with a person possessing many resources than with few resources. This last finding needs to be modified in light of a resource by obligation interaction. If a high resource person gave a gift with a high level of obligation attached, that person's ranking dropped to the level of a low resource person. Interpreting this in light of the attraction ratings, apparently one's attraction toward another is independent of the other's actions, however, when it comes to actually teaming up with another person, their actions become important.

Research Question #4.

Results of the 2 X 3 ANOVA indicated that the amount of money a subject loaned when placed in a winning condition was not a function of the previous condition they were in. Thus,

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it made no difference whether, in the prior group, they received $10 from a donor high or low in resources nor did the note of obligation attached have any significant influence on the amount of money they loaned.

One of the things we were trying to establish in this study was a moderate level of obligation that would net a high repayment rate, thus our "help someone else" condition. The goal was a "have your cake and eat it too" goal. We wanted a high level of attraction to be associated with a high return rate; or at least, if resources were not returned to the donor that they would be loaned to some other needy person. Previous research had failed in their attempts, and so did we. Although the finding was not significant, it is interesting to note that a comparison of the amount of money loaned as a function of previous condition indicated that when subjects were previously asked specifically to help someone else, there was a tendency to help less, exactly opposite from what we were hoping to find. It is also interesting to note, that in all of the conditions run, the amount of money either returned or loaned was less than the $10 they received.

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